DOGMA AND HISTORY

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The Essex Hall Lecture

BY

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London

PHILIP GREEN, 5 ESSEX STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1908.

GIFT OF THE MEADVILLE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

ELSOM AND CO., PRINTERS, HULL

PREFACE

In preparing this lecture I have made large use of my book, '*Das Dogma von der Dreieinigkeit und Gottmenschheit in seiner geschichtlichen Entwickelung dargestellt*' (Tübingen, Mohr, 1905), which forms part of Professor Weinel's well-known series '*Lebensfragen*.' Indeed, I might say, that what is said in the lecture is to some extent the essence of what is said in the book. Perhaps I should have given more of the evidence in the printed lecture. But

on second thoughts I prefer to leave it as it stands, and refer those readers, who may want a closer insight into the development indicated in the second part of the lecture, to the book just named. This is especially the case with regard to the origin and development of the Œcumenical Creeds.

I am quite conscious that experts will not find in the lecture anything new to them. But I had not them in view when I composed it. It was intended for those who have little or no acquaintance with the historical development of ideas which force themselves upon the minds of many amongst us with increasing power; and especially for those who, while becoming ever more uncertain about the validity of Creeds and Dogma,

cannot yet see their way to true religion without them. And thus I hope that my lecture may be useful in the missionary work of the Association which invited me to give it.

The lecture was delivered in Essex Hall, London, on 9 June, and repeated in Manchester College, Oxford, 12 June.

I have to acknowledge my sincere thanks to a clergyman from Ireland who kindly translated the lecture.

G. K.

GIESSEN, 14 *July*, 1908.

DOGMA AND HISTORY

THE subject on which I propose to speak to you is not a purely academic one, but rather one which touches most closely our individual life. The controversy regarding Dogma moves the hearts of many to-day as deeply as in former ages. One who like myself comes from Germany and as an academic theologian finds himself at the very centre of the conflict, understands its significance. In our national churches (*Landeskirchen*) the discussions in reference

to the attitude of the clergy and laity to the Dogmas of the Church have recently assumed an acute aspect. Our church authorities are still inclined to answer all questions according to the formulas of the ancient creeds, and to make such answers binding for every member of the community, and especially for the clergy. On the other hand the validity of Dogma and Creeds is disputed by very many earnest believers within our churches, and they are felt in an increasing degree to be an obstacle to the pure development of Faith. The tension thus brought about has caused during recent years manifest anxiety in our churches, and no one can foretell with confidence what the issue of this conflict will be.

Thus it will be readily understood that a systematic discussion of my subject is the immediate concern of a German theologian. But this, I fear, would not be sufficient reason for an English audience to be interested in the question as I am myself. Nevertheless, I venture to call your attention to the subject. It may be that the majority of you, like myself, occupy an independent position with regard to Dogma. But you must be aware that there are innumerable people in this country too who feel themselves in their innermost nature bound to the articles framed long, long ago, and whose judgment regarding the religious condition of an individual depends upon how that individual stands in reference to Dogma.

Therefore it becomes your duty for your own sake, ever and anew, to give account why you believe, that in the interests of Religion itself, it is necessary to take up that independent position. Only he whose opinions rest upon the firm ground of personal conviction can hope to hold this ground when discussing with a convinced adversary.

Permit me therefore to indicate to you the attempts that have been made to overthrow Dogma, and let us use this hour so that we may obtain a clear idea as to how far they have been successful.

I

If we ask ourselves how it has come to pass that the validity of Dogma is contro-

verted not only by those who are outside the Christian community, but also by genuine Christians themselves, we need not expect an answer from the great reformers of the sixteenth century. There are no doubt passages in the works of Luther which might be brought forward to prove that even he felt that the old Church Dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation were not inseparably bound up with his own personal piety. But neither he nor the other reformers could have comprehended the idea that these Dogmas, as the foundation of Faith, should be called into question by true Christians. Not only Calvin, but all the leaders of the Reformation, regarded it as self-evident that the daring Michael

Servetus, the Spanish physician who ventured to express in public such a pernicious doubt, on that account suffered death.

The Antitrinitarian—that is to say for that period, the antidogmatic movement in its first manifestation stood, generally speaking, in more or less close relationship to Anabaptism. The soil that fostered this growth was the humanistic and sceptical tendencies of the later Italian Renaissance. Already in the middle of the sixteenth century in Italy Antitrinitarianism had become a force apparently dangerous to the Church, and suppressed by her with all the means in her power. Its representatives, thus persecuted by the Inquisition, were obliged to leave their country and find a home in Poland,

where owing to the friendly intercourse between the cultivated there, and in Italy, they were welcomed, and found tolerance for their ideas.

Here in Poland laboured the man who perhaps was the most intellectual, at any rate the most striking personality and the most successful amongst these Antitrinitarians, the one who alone undertook to systematize his thoughts in a lucid and illuminating manner. I refer to the Italian Faustus Sozzini.

That Sozzini or Socinus was a genuine Christian there is no possibility of doubt. When an attempt was made to extort from him a recantation of his heretical teaching, he answered, with the sword quivering over

his head, 'I recant nothing, what I have been, I am, and will remain through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ till my last breath.' But Socinus was a pronounced opponent of the narrowing of Christianity by Dogma —a Latitudinarian in religious matters.

If we take up to-day the Racovian Catechism, that is to say the book which sets forth the religious point of view of the Socinians, we receive a welcome surprise at the assurance with which the fundamental idea of tolerance is there maintained. This catechism is not intended to be a binding rule; its purpose is not to lay down infallible laws for anyone. 'In religious questions,' so it runs, 'each one is free to form his own ideas. We only ask permission to express our own convictions

in reference to divine things without being interfered with by anybody.' Even to-day we may wonder at the boldness and the acuteness with which these convictions are set forth in the catechism. Most impressive are the arguments with which Reason, strengthened by the overthrow of the authority of an infallible Church, is ready to take the field.

Indeed, these arguments were irrefutable for all those who recognized the significance of the phrase, with which in ancient times Saint Augustine was harassed by his Pelagian opponent: *Quod ratio arguit auctoritas non potest vindicare*, which means, 'What Reason declares invalid, Authority cannot establish.' The number of those,

however, who were able to appreciate this sentence was everywhere at that time on the increase.

We have crossed the threshold of the seventeenth century. It is the epoch on the one hand when Dogma in the Lutheran and Reformed Churches has ceased to develop and has indeed become fossilized; when the revived Scholasticism of the Middle Ages celebrates an unexpected victory in the purposeless quarrels of deeply-read theologians. On the other hand, independent thought is at work and everywhere manifests activity in the realm of nature and in the spheres of intellectual life. Descartes utters the watchword, namely, *that* only is true and real, which is manifest, and that such clarity

can be gained through reasoning alone. Bacon beseeches Science to set aside her presuppositions, and indicates a new way for the intellectual activities of man. And the enlightened spirits who follow these two as their guides, even though on minor points they may not be in harmony with them, agree in this—in their decisive trust and confidence that Reason alone can lead us out of the darkness of nothingness into the clear light of reality. In England and France, in the Netherlands and in Germany, in wide circles of European culture these men are active in bringing about enlightenment and they are all sworn enemies of Dogma. They hold in their hands a new *Labarum* on which is inscribed in large

letters the word *Reason*, and by this they hope to conquer.

I need not go into details to show how large a share the representatives of English intellectual life took in this struggle. I may mention Herbert of Cherbury, Thomas Hobbes, the 'Father of Freethinkers,' John Locke's 'Reasonableness of Christianity' (1695), and above all John Toland's 'Christianity not Mysterious' (1696). It is of great interest for all who are acquainted with this development to observe how effectively Toland aimed at what he himself called the 'mysterious Dogmas.' But with all his criticism, this much defamed radical had a most positive end in view. His declared purpose was to aid Religion

by means of his criticism. In opposition to Deists and Atheists, to doubters and scoffers, he is determined to show that the traditional ecclesiastical apparatus—the Christianity of mystery and scholasticism—does not in any real sense belong to the essence of the Christian religion. In acting according to this principle Toland is very conservative if we apply to him the standards of our criticism. The Bible, especially the New Testament, is a *noli me tangere* for him. Just as Socinus, he was fully convinced that, as a matter of fact, the dogmas of the Church found no support in the New Testament. The dogma of the inspiration of the Bible, which had been with special care elaborated in the church-communities of the seventeenth

century, was a controlling power over his thoughts and over the thoughts of countless others who were his followers.[1]

But the axe was laid even to the root of this dogma. The book which the pious canon of Frauenburg, Nicolaus Copernicus, completed in 1530 and published in 1543 under the quite harmless title *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*, had since proved to be most dangerous. The author himself had no idea of the revolution which the conception of the universe developed in his work was destined to bring about in the intellectual life of mankind. It utterly destroyed the cosmology of the Bible. For a long time the Christian world took no heed

[1] See Note A, page 79.

of this complete change, but after all it could not but discover that what the theologians taught was not in harmony with the new knowledge. In spite of the valiant defence of many honest apologists the dogma of the verbal inspiration of Scripture had to yield at last to the irresistible attack. If the earth moves round the sun, then it was not true that the ever-revolving spheres had stood still at the command of Joshua; and a breach thus being made in the system in a single point, it followed as a matter of course that the whole world of wonders which the Bible contains and on which Dogma is founded, must furnish proof, if it was to find acceptance.

The calm consideration of the reality of

natural laws—those laws sublime, firmly established, and that know of no exception—forced itself with inexorable logic upon the attention of the thoughtful amongst believers and unbelievers. It is particularly worthy of note how clearly Spinoza, in his *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, published in 1670, and in some casual statements contained in his letters, gave the right direction to Biblical criticism, not without adding arguments of a positive character which would be an ornament to any modern discussion on theological subjects.

The struggle, however, proved much more serious than the standard-bearers of Reason anticipated. Rationalism and Criticism invaded the church-communities through many

a breach, and dealt a severe blow to Dogma; yet their success was doubtful. In opposition to the attempts to apply to dogma the standard of Reason and to cast it aside, because it did not stand the test, men called to mind the well-tried phrase, namely, that Reason ought not to interfere with matters of Faith. Identifying Dogma and Faith, they held tenaciously to the conviction, that Dogma was based upon Revelation, and as a consequence is proof against rationalistic attacks. In doing so they did not claim a position contrary to Reason, but rather above it; and such a claim must prove too much for Reason, if she were not able to show that Dogma was a human work effected in time—that it is not a

matter of Revelation and has in itself no eternal worth—that in reality Faith and Dogma are not identical, and that the attack upon Dogma does not in any way endanger Faith. This proof, however, History alone could furnish.

It is well known, what a revolution with regard to the knowledge and understanding of bygone ages has been effected by the modern science of history resting upon the thorough investigation and the exact criticism of documents, and it is also universally recognized that the Germans have occupied a distinguished and indeed the foremost place in this scientific work; and more especially in the field of Biblical criticism and in the history of Dogma. In

proof of this I could bring before you an impressive list of well-known names. Suffice it to mention one, which is held in the highest esteem even beyond the borders of the Fatherland—to make use of our homely term—the name of Ferdinand Christian Baur, the famous chief of the so-called Tübingen school.

If in spite of the progress of science, ground was gained only by slow steps, if indeed the ecclesiastical reaction during the nineteenth century succeeded in proclaiming Dogma as the highest good of Christianity, German science is not wholly free from blame—or perhaps I should not say Science, but rather the whole tendency of intellectual activity in Germany during the first half of the

nineteenth century, upon which as a matter of fact Science is dependent. The influence of the so-called idealistic philosophy, the influence of Schelling, and above all that of Hegel, has proved itself injurious in reference to that point of view, from which I should like you to watch the development. The Hegelian Philosophy of History, which Baur himself espoused, wrapped anew the belief in God the Father, in Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit active in Christianity, in the garment of metaphysical theories, and the Church speculations regarding the Trinity and the Incarnation were welcomed as supporters of philosophical constructions. In consequence of this, however, the illusion was created that these speculations were

necessary and inseparably bound up with Christian Faith, that Dogma therefore was the true basis of Christianity.

It may be easily understood, that the orthodox theology knew how to profit by the circumstances thus changed to its advantage. Its representatives have in many learned books, with great formal skill, and with the appearance of the deepest science, sought to maintain that Dogma under the guidance of the Holy Spirit had been elaborated in the course of history as the necessary and authoritative expression of Christian truth, and they have not failed to produce an impression on the Church and on a large proportion of the laity.

If this was a bad effect, it was a much

more serious thing, that the more enlightened spirits, in whom faith in Dogma had been destroyed through the knowledge of historical truth, remained under the charm of that Hegelian theory, and reached the conclusion that with the overthrow of Dogma Christianity itself was shattered.

The standard-bearer of these old foes with a new face was David Friedrich Strauss, the far-famed author of the Life of Jesus. He had already shown in his 'Christian Dogmatics' (*Die Christliche Glaubenslehre*) the bankruptcy, as he himself termed it, of dogmatic Christianity. On the ground of this negative statement he raised the question, in his last book on 'The Old and the New Faith' (*Der alte und der neue Glaube*):

'Are we still Christians?' And he gave this answer: 'If we refuse to quibble and shift, if we will not turn and twist the facts, if we will let Yea be yea and Nay nay, in a word, if we desire to speak as honest and sincere men, we must confess we are no longer Christians.' This conclusion made a most profound impression upon a great— a very great number of our educated people. It worked with all the force of a proved fact, and I must be greatly deceived if the results in England were different from those in Germany, admitting of course that other forces may have aided in the result here.

Now, is that conclusion really final? Must we really surrender ourselves to such dazzling logic? And if we will not do so,

is there for us no other way than to turn back to the position that Dogma is the true expression of our faith? I venture to give the positive answer that there is another way. In support of this I call to the rescue the science of history—not History lending herself to be the handmaid of Speculation, be that ecclesiastical or philosophical—but History conscious of her autonomy, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left, but with her eye fixed on the goal directly ahead, not shrinking back from seeing things as they really are.

Unfortunately the liberating effect which Science in its inflexible honesty brings about in all fields of human knowledge, is still undervalued by the laity and even by theo-

logians. Certainly History does not work in the same way as Mathematics. She cannot set forth proof with the same cogency. She needs documents, and these documents are always open to different interpretations. Now, Faith discerns much too readily in these interpretations the influence of Rationalism, and whatever the heart says against Reason, it is inclined also to apply to History. Let us investigate whether in doing so Faith is in the right.

II

The documents of the Dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation are the so-called Œcumenical Symbols—that is, symbols universally accepted—namely, the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds. The

circumstances under which these creeds originated have not been with complete satisfaction ascertained in reference to any of them. But the following may in my opinion be said with certainty about them.

The latest of the three is the Athanasian Creed. With the famous Bishop of Alexandria, after whom it is named, it has nothing whatever to do. It did not originate in the East at all, but is rather a product of the Western Church; probably of the Gallic, perhaps the Spanish Church of the sixth or fifth century. If you seek for a sponsor amongst the great Fathers of the Church, it must be Augustine. His intellectual legacy is recognizable in every sentence of the creed.

These sentences, forty in number, contain

the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation in their most distinct form.

'Whosoever will be saved'—so the creed begins—'before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith. And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son: and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal.' These fundamental ideas are repeated in the first half of the creed in a good many phrases and with monotonous effect. Then follows the doctrine of the In-

carnation, namely, 'that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the Substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the Substance of his Mother, born in the world, perfect God and perfect Man.' These sentences too are repeated with variations, and to them is added the doctrine of the suffering and death, the resurrection and reign in eternal glory of the God-Man.

Originally the Athanasian Creed was the touchstone of orthodoxy for the clergy, who were obliged to learn it by heart, and it has never been regarded differently in the Roman Catholic Church. It first of all acquired significance for the laity in the churches of the Reformation, but it is only

in the Anglican Church that it is utilized in the church services, and even there, to judge from recent utterances of well-informed Anglican theologians, there is reason to believe that erelong it may fall into disuse.

The Nicene, or more correctly speaking the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, received its name from the first two Œcumenical Councils, and is the ecclesiastical precipitate of the Arian controversy of the fourth century. Even to-day it is the symbol—the only symbol—of the Orthodox-Eastern, the so-called Greek Church. It is the creed used at Mass in the Roman Catholic Church, which not only Mozart and Beethoven, to mention no others, but also the Lutheran Bach, have set to music. It is also the

liturgical creed of the High Church. The other Protestant communities do not use it in church service, though they estimate it more highly than the Athanasian Creed, and that with good reason, for the whole structure of the creed is such that it is much more suitable for the laity than the Athanasian.

In luminous outline the figure of the God-Man is painted here, who was born of the Father before the ages, Light of Light, true God of true God, of the same essence with the Father, descended from heaven and become man, the wondrous being, reverenced by millions and millions as the victor over death and hell, as the redeemer from sin and guilt, and the surety for life eternal.

The doctrine that in this being the divine and the human nature are not confounded, and yet inseparably united in one person, is only implicitly contained in the Creed. It was after a long controversy that the Fathers at Chalcedon stated this doctrine explicitly, and put it into the form in which it has become the Palladium of the Church's Faith.

It is a most attractive task to trace the origin and development of this doctrine of the God-Man, and especially to note the influence of Greek Philosophy upon this development. But this is a task, which reveals its charms only upon a close study, and which I could not in an incidental way do justice to; one also which is not neces-

sarily connected with the question that is before us. I know well that Dr. Harnack's famous hypothesis that this dogma in its origin and development is the product of the Greek intellect, with the Gospel as its foundation, is not accepted by all those whose work in this field gives them a right to speak. Nevertheless, there is no doubt amongst the experts, that the golden ground upon which our picture is painted is the work of the Greek artist, and that the striking colours of the picture itself came from his palette. On the other hand, there can be no question that the underlying features of the picture are older and were outlined before the Greek painter began his work.

And thus we are carried back to the

threshold of primitive Christianity. For even the Apostles' Creed contains the doctrine of the God-Man, though in a more simple form. In reference to our subject this creed is the most important, because it is the most ancient, not indeed in the shape in which we have it to-day, which contains several additions not to be found in the original text of the second century. These additions we set aside, and then the old creed runs as follows :—'I believe in God the Father Almighty and in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord, who was born of the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and buried, on the third day he rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, sitteth on the right hand of the Father, from

whence he cometh to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, a Holy Church, forgiveness of sin and resurrection of the body.'

When and where these words were put together is a question which, up to the present, it is not possible to answer with certainty. The legend that the creed was framed by the apostles need not detain us. I do not know any serious student who accepts it, and we are sure of this at any rate, that the creed does not belong to the first century. Many scholars hold the view that it was composed in the East during the first half of the second century. Personally I agree with those who like Professor McGiffert of New York, date its composition shortly after the year 150,

and who regard the Roman bishop and his presbyters as its authors.[1]

This, however, is comparatively unimportant. It is sufficient for us to know that sometime and somewhere in the second century, and therefore in the early Christian period, the belief of the Christian communities was put into this form. It is of greater importance to learn why this happened. And I must try to explain this process to you as best I can, although I know it is somewhat difficult to follow.

The Christians of the second century were by no means an undivided body. The Greek philosopher Celsus, an acute observer, author of one of the first anti-Christian treatises

[1] See Note B, page 80.

based upon accurate knowledge, could give expression to the view that the only thing common to Christians was the name. And, as a matter of fact, while hundreds were baptized in the name of Christ, on the all-important question: What think ye of Christ? opinions were widely different. Beside those Christians in town and country, grounded upon the Apostles' Faith, and who even at that period were not united into one universal Catholic Church, there rise before our eyes sects of a most diverse character: the Basilidians, the Carpocratians, the Valentinians, the Marcionites, and many others whom we are wont to comprehend under the collective term Gnostics, derived from the Greek word '*Gnosis*,' which means

knowledge, *here* knowledge about God and divine things, the possession of which in one way or another they thought they were able to obtain. These Gnostics sought to draw Christianity into the stream of those general tendencies in the spheres of Religion and Theosophy, by which at that time many more or less ingenious minds were fascinated, and the result of which precipitated itself in the manifold mysteries which form a characteristic feature of heathen worship in the Imperial age.

All these Gnostics saw in Christ the bearer of a divine Revelation, but they very loosely, or, not at all, connected their belief with the man Jesus of Nazareth, of whom the oral and the written tradition of the disciples

spoke. Their pessimistic conviction regarding the corruption of this world, which they deemed completely enchained in the bonds of the evil powers, made it intolerable to them that the Redeemer who came down from the lofty heights of divine life to the lowland of human imperfection, could be brought into contact with the flesh at any point of his earthly career. The boldest amongst them, Marcion, the radical critic of the Bible, regardless of consequences, cut from his gospel of Luke the first three chapters—that is to say, the entire story of the birth—and let the text begin: 'In the fifteenth year of the Emperor Tiberius God descended (that is from heaven) to Capernaum and taught on the Sabbath.' The

birth, life, suffering, and death were to be only the means of deluding the evil powers, who thought to have grasped their victim at last, when as a matter of fact it was snatched from them. Back into the Elysian fields the Æon flew, having completed his work and having revealed the highest God to those who were worthy of such revelation.

In such a mythical figure the Christians were unable to recognize the Christ whom the Apostles had preached to them, but at the same time they were conscious of the danger with which these Gnostic conceptions threatened their faith. In order to counteract this attack, they framed the baptismal confession. According to ancient practice, the names of God, Jesus Christ, and of the

Spirit were pronounced over the candidate for baptism, or as we have it in the Gospel according to Matthew in a command put into the mouth of the risen Lord himself, the names of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. In these three names, which were not yet related to each other in any metaphysical sense, the essence of the Christian faith seemed to be best expressed. But this was now no longer sufficient, and a more detailed exposition became necessary.

He who sought to be admitted into the community, must confess in unmistakable terms that this world is not the world of evil demons, but that it was created by Almighty God. With perfect clearness it must be stated that Jesus Christ is not the

sham-being of whom the Gnostics told their fabulous stories, and when the Holy Ghost was named there must be added, what in the belief of Christians were the gifts which he was ever active in producing, and which the Gnostics had struck out of their catechism.

In the middle of this confession were placed the sentences in which the wondrous story of the birth of the Lord, his wondrous career on earth, and his life in heaven was simply and plainly put together. It was a wondrous story, but—strange as it may seem to you—it was not for that reason that it was recorded, but because in the conviction of the Christians, it was a true record, the real history of a new man indeed, but nevertheless a man of flesh and blood. 'He truly suffered,' so

writes Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, who did not yet know the creed, 'and he truly rose again, not as some unbelievers (he alludes to the Gnostics) say, he only appeared to suffer.' 'Do not fall into the snares of imagination, but believe with fullest conviction in the birth, suffering, and resurrection, which really took place under Pontius Pilate, the Procurator, and which in truth and sincerity was achieved by Jesus Christ, our hope.'

You no doubt share my feelings when I say that it is no light thing to approach this record with the probe of matter-of-fact criticism. The words spontaneously come to our mind: 'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest

is holy ground.' But Science is inexorable. She reverences the expression of the convictions of past generations, but she can and ought not to renounce inquiry into tradition. However sacred tradition may be by age and content, it must not come into conflict with historical facts.

Now, we can bring forward statements of considerable weight to show that the most ancient Christian tradition knew nothing whatever of a supernatural birth of Jesus.

First of all, up to the second century, and even within it, there were a good number of Christians who held tenaciously that Jesus was the son of Joseph. The witness of these so-called Judaic Christians, which the church indeed has henceforth reprobated, is all the

more valuable and devoid of suspicion, in that these people lived in Palestine, the birthplace of Christianity, and knew themselves to be in close contact with the tradition of the first Christians.

Secondly, our Gospels themselves contain clear traces of a tradition to which the birth of Jesus from a virgin is altogether foreign. No one who impartially reads the words in Matt. 13^{55-56}, 'Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren, James and Joses, and Simon and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?' will wish to search for another meaning behind these plain words than the one which is most evident. And still more clearly is it stated in Luke 4^{22}

in the ancient Syriac translation of the Gospels found by Mrs. Lewis: 'Is not this the son of Joseph?'

The genealogical tables in the first chapter of Matthew and in the third chapter of Luke, in the form in which we have them to-day, indeed connect Jesus with Mary. But this form is clearly a later one, for the genealogical tables originally were meant to connect Joseph's son Jesus with David, yea with Adam and therefore with God himself. The Syriac translation reads: 'Jacob begat Joseph, Joseph begat Jesus who was called the Messiah.' I know well that there is added to the word Joseph 'to whom Mary the virgin was betrothed,' but this must be an interpolation, if we are not to admit a

complete contradiction, since one and the same author could not speak of Joseph as the father and Mary as the virgin.

The apostle Paul has nowhere directly expressed himself as to the question of the generation and birth of Jesus, and it is always precarious to draw important conclusions from the *argumentum e silentio*. But can we assume that this ardent genius who with such passionate ingenuousness speaks of everything that touches his believing heart, should have been silent in reference to a fact which, if he had been aware of it, must have been to him of the greatest importance, and of as much religious value as to the Christians of later days who inscribed it upon the banner of their faith? I won't

deny, however, that, with the preponderance which for the apostle's personal conviction the Christ of Faith possessed over the Jesus of History, he, without any prejudice to the fatherhood of Joseph, which he regarded as self-evident, saw in the Holy Ghost the true begetter of him who was born of the woman. From this, however, there was only a step to the complete omission of the human agent of generation.

Probably we never shall obtain a satisfactory answer to the question who it was that first of all made reference to the Virgin Mary. The origin of the conception may be veiled from us for ever. The only New Testament documents which contain the story—Matthew and Luke—give us no indi-

cation. In my opinion, it cannot be denied that the well-known prophecy of Isaiah may have had a decisive influence in forming it. The Christians of the sub-apostolic age, who had great faith in the Bible, and for whom the literal fulfilment of each prophetic word that referred to the Messiah was to be found in their Christ, would without difficulty derive from such a prophecy the Virgin Birth. That the original text refers to a young wife and not to a virgin, they did not know, since the Greek translation used by them contained the incorrect text.

In addition to this reference to a misunderstood prophecy, we must above all remember how easily such an idea fitted into the general conceptions of that age.

Its miraculous character strikes the men of to-day with astonishment, and for those amongst us, for whom it has still preserved a religious meaning, it is significant for the very reason that it implies an absolute miracle. For them it is in reality the uniqueness of the event that gives it its worth. But the Christians of that age had no scruples on this account. 'When we say,' so Justin the Martyr writes in his Apology, 'that the word of God came into the world without human generation, namely, Jesus Christ our Lord and Master, and that he ascended to heaven after his crucifixion and resurrection, we are not in so doing referring to anything unheard of. Compare with this your own sons of Zeus. You are aware indeed of how

many sons of Zeus your authors speak. They tell of Hermes the divine word and teacher, of the god of medicine Æsculapius who was killed by a thunderbolt and ascended to heaven, as did also Dionysius after he was slain; and Herakles after he submitted himself to death by fire, and the sons of Leda, the Dioscuri, and Perseus, the son of Danæ, and lastly Bellerophon, who though of human origin ascended on his Pegasus.'

It was wholly foreign to the Christian author to controvert the possibility of such events in the history of the heathen gods and demi-gods, only he demands what is fair in reference to his Christ; and in so doing he was quite right. Moreover, the

belief in the superhuman generation of historical heroes was current everywhere. Alexander the Great was presented by Zeus to his mother Olympias. The Emperor Augustus was regarded as a son of Apollo, and Plato too had a virgin for his mother.

No one has expressed the motive for the origin of such stories better than Origen of Alexandria. After he has mentioned the wondrous birth of Plato he continues: 'But of course this is in reality a myth, and the simple impulse to invent this about Plato is, that he was believed to possess more power and wisdom than his fellow-men, and therefore must have derived his body from a higher—a divine source.' Doubtless what appeared to Origen self-evi-

dent as far as Plato was concerned, would if applied to Christ have seemed blasphemous. But that cannot alter the fact that the belief in the supernatural birth of Jesus, however it may have arisen, must have found welcome support in the popular belief of the age and also in the ideas current in educated circles.[1]

The same is true in regard to the Resurrection and Ascension. If the conception of the Resurrection is in the end to be connected with an inner experience of the disciples, the form of the reports in the Gospels which contradict each other in so many ways, is a manifest product of popular belief, and the same holds good in reference to the Ascension. All this in its application to

[1] See Note C, page 82.

Christ contains nothing which goes beyond what was familiar to those times. Through the glorious conclusion of his marvellous life on earth, this Christ is proved to be the Lord who now has taken his seat beside the almighty God as the future judge of the world.

III

The historical inquiry which we have now gone through might seem to lead away from the fundamental question which we are investigating, but that is not so. It was necessary to delay over a critical consideration of the so-called second article of the Creed, because it is only through this that I can approach my thesis.

I have already reminded you that Faith

objects when Reason intrudes upon its sphere, and I have added that in my opinion such objection is justified. If I am to be successful, all depends upon whether in considering the Creed I have not infringed this rule of non-intrusion. Now, this is exactly what the defenders of the Creed and therefore of Dogma maintain. Professor Zahn, of Erlangen, one of the ablest of our conservative theologians, once wrote: 'He who sets aside as unhistorical the tradition—the earliest we can obtain—regarding the beginning and the end of the life of Jesus, should make it clear to himself and others, that in doing so he does not act on the ground of historical investigation and trustworthy inference drawn from the sources,

but that the sole and decisive reason for his proceeding is a dogma which lies at the basis of the historical investigation, namely, the dogma that the generation of a human individual without the medium of a father, and the resurrection of one who was really dead, are miracles and therefore cannot be historical facts.'[1]

I will not raise the question with what right our opponent designates as dogma what to us seems only the incontrovertible expression of all our experience, apart from the supposed exception which we are considering. But I wish strongly to emphasize that in the inquiry which I have made that 'sole and decisive reason' has neither

[1] See Note D, page 83.

implicitly or explicitly been a determining factor with me. My arguments were by no means rationalistic ones, they were all drawn from History. The subject-matter of my inquiry is not the general question regarding Parthenogenesis. The question is, has it in this particular case really happened. This, however, is a question of History.

Dr. Zahn himself has shown us the right way in speaking of the incriminated sentences of the Creed as, in his opinion, historical facts. We *know* facts, we don't *believe* in them. After all we should free ourselves from the scholastic idea, that Faith is only a degenerate product of knowledge. Faith is a function of the human soul separated fundamentally from knowledge

not only in degree but in kind. Faith and Revelation are related to each other as the subjective and the objective in Religion. If you will know what Faith is, you must descend into the depths of the human heart. If you will learn what Revelation is, you must *search* into the deep things of God in so far as the spirit enables you (I Cor. 2^{10}). To use the language of philosophy, Faith and Revelation lead us into the region of Judgments of Worth (*Werturteile*). This region, however, defies investigation in the sense in which we practise inquiry in the field of history. History is not Revelation.

In the correct sense of the word we should not say: I *know* that there is a God, and on the other hand we should not speak of

believing that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, etc., but rather of believing in Jesus Christ of whom is known (on the ground of statements and information received in such and such a way) that he was born of a virgin, etc. This is meant also by the Creed, as the structure of the sentences clearly shows. Belief in the facts is not demanded, these facts being of course for those who framed the Creed the indispensable preamble of belief and therefore the basis of their Christian faith.

Certainly we ought not to weaken this, but rather to strengthen in us the conviction, that that wonderful legend is a beautiful vesture, the most beautiful perhaps in which a divine thought was ever enrobed. Never-

theless it remains a vesture, the outer garment of something greater. And that greater is the man Jesus himself.

In uttering this sentence, I am deeply conscious of the serious objection which can be raised against it. Has not the life of Jesus too become the subject-matter of critical inquiry? Have not our scholars turned over again and again the leaves of the Gospels in order to investigate how much of what is related there may, when impartially considered, be regarded as authentic? Are there not many indeed who hold that we know very little of this Jesus? And are there not those who have in trumpet-tones declared that Jesus is solely the product of pious imagination?

All that is perfectly true, and in my opinion we dare not even here seek for a loophole by which to escape and which would lead us away from our direct route. Our answer to such questions must rather be: No, not even when the question is of Jesus, do we rest our Faith upon History; that might prove to be depending on a broken reed. If we wish to vindicate what he has brought to mankind as a divine message, we must ground our statement upon a more solid foundation.

But what does that mean? Do we not thus leave the firm ground? Do we not hear the taunt of the many who reproach us with pursuing a phantom, as the Gnostics did, whose bypaths we ourselves thought we

had thus clearly seen? Permit me to use a comparison by way of introducing what I have yet to say.

There are many amongst us who are musical or at least pretend to be so. Properly speaking, a person is not musical on account of his being more or less skilled in playing the violin or the piano, or because music is to him something different from a disagreeable noise. He alone is musical who with reverential thoughts and feelings sits at the feet of the great masters, and in their tones is conscious of another world awaking within him. No one who feels in this way will allow his experience to be disputed by anybody as to its reality. Nay, I will go further. Such a man will say to himself,

if he belongs to the reflective class of men: the reality of this feeling of mine is not grounded on something transitory in me. What moves me with such irresistible force, what overrules me with such a compelling power, what works on others as powerfully as it does on me, must have a higher origin, cannot be of this earth. Now, with this we have again passed over to Judgment of Worth. Our judgment we cannot force upon one who does not feel himself lifted into higher spheres, when the first tones of the Eroica strike his ear, or when hundreds of jubilating voices resound in the glorious Sanctus, as Bach has set it to music.

That in and through the person of Jesus a higher reality has been revealed to us,

this century of criticism knows as well as any former age. If in our judgment the forms in which the Church tried to comprehend him, have weakened and faltered, his image is not therefore destroyed. His glad message has outlived the centuries and up to this day is for those who are susceptible to the highest thoughts, as clear and illuminating as it was of old, when he sat amongst his disciples and unveiled to them the wealth of his inner nature. What he has brought to mankind, men of to-day can feel in its reality with overmastering power. He freed the moral good from its embarrassing entanglement with purity through ritual and with the chaos of popular tradition, in which, in Judaism and Heathenism, it was

imprisoned. He did not set this good before man as the incomprehensible law of an unknowable God, but as the world-embracing and yet concentrated feeling of love and purity which makes us children of the Father in heaven, whose attitude towards us is the comfort and strength of our inner life. It raises us above suffering and sin, and teaches us that on this earth something new and marvellous may begin —the rule of God.

All this forces itself upon the susceptible with a power not born of this world. God has revealed himself in Jesus. Again this statement is a Judgment of Worth, the highest perhaps that human lips can utter, and yet a judgment that we can force upon

no one, to whom the words of Jesus mean nothing more than the tones of the masters mean to the unmusical. This is a faith which Science cannot demonstrate, but which just as little can it destroy. It is consistent with our new view of the world, when it is freed from the forms with which men once draped it, and in this process it loses nothing of its originality.

Once in history the content of this faith became Truth in the life of a man, became incarnated, to use the expression freed from its dross; and which cannot be any longer misunderstood. The pages of history reveal to us in a wonderful way the power of expansion and intensity with which the life of this man has impressed itself upon

humanity. The Jesus of History has appeared to his followers in a thousand forms. No thoughtful Christian has ever drawn near to him without forming his image according to his individual understanding. What differences there are from the beginning! Imagine what a world lies between the simple people of Jerusalem, as they are set before us in the Acts of the Apostles, who continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and prayers, and the man who wrote the astonishing words: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,' and who set before us the earthly life of the divine Logos in pictures so grand and marvellous. Yet Acts and

Gospel have both of them found their place in the same sacred book, separated only by a few pages, and again near them arises the awe-inspiring figure of Christ, which was created by the Rabbi of Tarsus.

It is, indeed, a unique spectacle, that this ever-varying form, which Christ has assumed throughout the pages of history during so many hundreds of years, reveals to him whose eyes are open to the charm of history. Perhaps nowhere may we understand so clearly the meaning of the Eternal in the Temporal as when face to face with this marvellous transformation.

In the words of Goethe we may say :

> Vom Himmel steigend Jesus bracht'
> Des Evangeliums ewige Schrift,

Den Jüngern las er sie Tag und Nacht,
Ein göttlich Wort, es wirkt und trifft.
Er stieg zurück, nahms wieder mit,
Sie aber hattens gut gefühlt,
Und jeder schrieb, so Schritt für Schritt,
Wie ers in seinem Sinn behielt,
Verschieden. Es hat Nichts zu bedeuten!
Sie hatten nicht gleiche Fähigkeiten;
Doch damit können sich die Christen
Bis zu dem jüngsten Tage fristen.[1]

The following is an English translation of Goethe's lines:

From Heaven descending, Jesus brought
The holy Writ's eternal thought.
To his disciples day and night
He read the word that works with might.
Then took it back the way he came,
But they had rightly caught its aim.
So, step by step, each one declared
The way its sense within them fared,
Each different. That's of no account,
In wit they varied and amount;
Yet Christians find in it to stay
Their hunger till the Judgment Day.

[1] The lines are in the 'West-östlicher Divan' (*Buch der Parabeln*).

And now I have reached the conclusion. I had in mind to show you the way in which Dogma can be overthrown without damaging Religion. The alliance between Religion and Dogmatism appears to us with good reason not to be essential. But we will not sever it by reconciling Science and Religion. Dr. Crothers, of Cambridge, was quite right when two years ago he said: 'We have all long since become tired of these formal reconciliations. They were only the attempts at reconciling specific results of scientific investigation with certain dogmas of the church. The real conflict, which they for the most part overlooked, is between the dogmatic temper and the habit of scientific inquiry.' I gladly concur with my American

colleague in saying that the dogmatic temper must be overcome, and I am sure he would agree with me when I say that what is eternal in Christianity is completely independent of the formulas in which the Churches of all ages have enclosed it. Here as everywhere the word is valid: 'The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth Life.'

NOTES

NOTE A, page 22. It will surely not be without interest for English readers also, that theological science in Germany has recently been paying special attention to the study of the movement of 'Illumination' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. After devoting their best strength for decades to work in the field of early Church history and of the Protestant Reformation, scholars are beginning to recognize how important for the understanding of the religious, ecclesiastical, and theological position of the present is a thorough study of the historical development of the new Protestantism, which began in the middle of the seventeenth century. And now for the first time it is being fully realized how decisive a part the English writers had in that movement.

In this connexion renewed attention has been called to the theologians also. Nothing of consequence concerning the English Deists has been written in Germany since Gottfried Victor Lechler. His book, published in 1841, could no longer satisfy the demands of scientific scholarship, but a new comprehensive treatment of the great theme has not yet been forthcoming. What was needed here also was in the first instance some pioneer work, and in this the first place

must be given to the name of Ernst Troeltsch, of Heidelberg, who earlier than others recognized the necessity for this undertaking, and with astonishing energy has devoted himself to it in a number of separate essays. As pioneer work in the same direction must be reckoned the plan for a German translation of the most important writings of the English theologians of the period of 'Illumination,' following on the earlier publication of the chief works of the philosophers (Bacon, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, etc.). A beginning has been made by Leopold Zscharnack with the publication of a translation of Toland's 'Christianity not Mysterious,' by Wilhelm Lunde (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1908). His admirable introduction to this edition shows what progress has been made among us in the scientific understanding of that important movement, to which I have alluded. The time is perhaps not far distant, when attention will have to be paid to these efforts in England also, although for the present we may still be more of receivers than givers.

NOTE B, page 43. I consider the book of Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Washburn Professor of Church History in the Union Theological Seminary, New York, on 'The Apostles' Creed: Its Origin, Its Purpose, and Its Historical Interpretation' (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902) by far the best critical dissertation

on this difficult subject. In my book (see Preface), I have attempted to set forth my own conception (reached independently of McGiffert, but practically the same as his) in its larger connexion with the history of the dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation. The question of the origin and purpose of the first baptismal confession is of far greater significance for that history than most presentations of it lead one to suspect. To give a right answer one must recognize on the one hand that the formulation of the baptismal confession was an important means for protecting the community from heretical opinions, and on the other hand that this formulation could only take place after the heretical, that is, the Gnostic opinions had gained an influence dangerous to the existence of the community. That was the case even in the first decade of the second century, as may be seen from the letters of Bishop Ignatius of Antioch. But proof has hitherto been lacking that Ignatius already presupposes a baptismal confession in the communities. What is certain is that Justin the Martyr, in his full description of Christian worship about 150 (see his first Apology, chapter 61ff.) not only betrays no knowledge of a baptismal confession, but by his description definitely excludes such a confession, at least for the Roman community of his time. The suggested date for the origin of a confession of the kind, the text of

which is quoted in my lecture, was the time soon after 150. I would call the attention of those acquainted with the literature of that time to the connexions which may be shown to exist between the confession and the Homily usually spoken of as the Second Epistle of Clement. They will find something on this subject in my book. Whoever is inclined, as I am, with Harnack, to identify the author of the homily with the Roman bishop Soter (c. 166–174), will feel the attractiveness of the hypothesis that just this Soter and his presbyters may have had a decided share in the composition of the baptismal confession also. In any case it was in Rome first of all, so far as our knowledge goes, that the custom arose of demanding of the candidate for baptism a confession of definitely formulated articles of faith. That, however, does not of course exclude the possibility of the Bishop and presbyters who composed the form of words known to us, having made use of some older formulas, which were applied in the communities, and particularly in the East, especially for purposes of exorcism. For a fuller explanation of this difficult but most interesting question I must refer to the above-named descriptions.

NOTE C, page 60. I must not omit to refer my readers to the interesting book by P. Saintyves, 'Les vierges mères et les naissances miraculeuses,' (Paris,

1908). Saintyves here sets what he calls *the idealization of the birth of Christ* in its wider connexion with all Divine marriages, which are known to us in the general history of religion. Saintyves belongs to the so-called Modernists, and it is certainly worthy of notice that this Catholic theologian has treated this subject more thoroughly and comprehensively than has ever been done before.

NOTE D, page 63. These words are in Dr. Zahn's brochure, '*Der Kampf um das Apostolikum*' (Nürnberg, 1893). I chose that particular passage as showing with special clearness the method which the Apologists of Dogma amongst us are accustomed to use. Recent theological literature in Germany is unhappily rich in such productions. It is, of course, understood that in historical investigation also the demand, which is at the basis of all scientific work, must be fully recognized, that our conclusions may not be in conflict with established and undoubted facts of our experience. Nevertheless, we do not meet the historical account of a 'miracle' with the apologetic assertion that miracles are impossible; our duty rather is to subject accounts of apparently inexplicable things and events to fresh investigation, to see if they are reliable, and if they prove to be reliable, whether they are not capable of natural explanation.

If one wished to be malicious, one might say that Dr. Zahn and the other Apologists of Dogma often enough fall into inconsistency with their own principles. Into the analogies, which Church history offers, for example, to the resurrection of Jesus, they do not willingly enter. And yet Savonarola after his death appeared more than a hundred times alive, of course only to those who had a 'living interest in him,' as Dr. Zahn knows Jesus did himself. He handed the sacred Host through the grating to the nuns in the Cloister of Saint Lucia. The conscientiousness of the narrator is no more to be doubted than the honesty of those persons, who, after the death of Filippo Neri, affirmed on oath that the saint had appeared to them in bodily form. If one nevertheless argues against such a belief, and throws doubt upon the 'fact,' which is indeed less fully attested, that Perseus and the Dioscuri were not begotten by human fathers, it is clearly, in Dr. Zahn's mind, because 'the generation of a human individual without the medium of a father, and the resurrection of one who was really dead, are miracles and therefore cannot be historical facts.' Thus the same 'dogma' is brought into play, the unjustifiable use of which is made a reproach, with such emphasis and doubtful logic, to the critic of the Gospel history.

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